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Review

MIGUEL ANGEL GARCÍA, *Ethiopian Biblical Commentaries on the Prophet Micah*

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Reviews

seem to demand that any analysis they offer be treated with the utmost seriousness. Moreover, general studies of the translation of the Bible have pointed out the decisive role played by local Christians. Could foreign missionaries, no matter how linguistically skilled, have mastered Ethiopic sufficiently to produce independent translations? Do not the misunderstandings of Greek point to local more than foreign translators?

It is impossible to conclude this review without a word about the technical merits and deficiencies of this work. By double-spacing both the text and footnotes the editors and publishers have produced a work which is easy to read and clearly presented. It is a shame that it is marred with typographical errors, which appear sometimes two to a page throughout the text. Consider, for example, the penultimate sentence of the book: "This kind of instinctive approach could lead to casualness, it (sic) not carelessness, and to be the cause of renderings that are inadequate". Inconsistency and casualness are apparently not characteristics limited to the translators of the Ethiopic version of the Old Testament.

Steven Kaplan

MIGUEL ANGEL GARCÍA, *Ethiopian Biblical Commentaries on the Prophet Micah* = Aethiopistische Forschungen Bd. 52. Harrassowitz Verlag: Wiesbaden 1999. viii, 343 pp. DM 168,-. ISBN 3-447-04199-4.

For the international academic world, the study of Ethiopian Bible commentaries is a field in its infancy. In fact, the entire bibliography of publications in this area can be listed on one page. First, there was the groundbreaking work of the late ROGER W. COWLEY who can be credited with inspiring this area of research. In addition to some preliminary articles, he published two books, *The Traditional Interpretation of the Apocalypse of St. John in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church* = Oriental Publications 33 (Cambridge 1983) and *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation* = Oriental Publications 38 (Cambridge 1988), before his untimely death. Since then, a few other articles have appeared and two further book-length studies: KIRSTEN PEDERSEN's *Traditional Ethiopian Exegesis of the Book of Psalms* = Aethiopistische Forschungen 36 (Wiesbaden 1995) and WOLDE TENSAE ANDEBERHAN's *Commentari Etiopici sul Libro del Profeta Osea* = Aethiopistische Forschungen 40 (Wiesbaden 1994). GARCÍA's 1996 article

(Ethiopian traditional Biblical interpretation = *African Christian Studies* 12 1–8) and his current volume provide two more much-needed entries for this short bibliography.

GARCÍA's book is presented in three sections. The first details his eight source manuscripts for the Ethiopian commentaries on the prophet Micah and his reasons for dividing them into three groups. Since the commentary manuscripts also contain the underlying Biblical text to a greater or lesser degree, GARCÍA has consulted in addition four manuscripts and two printed editions of the book of Micah, all of which are described here also. The second section of the book discusses literary forms and technical terminology. The third, the bulk of the book, presents an edition of one manuscript from each of these three groups, along with an apparatus of variants and an English translation. EMMML Pr. n. 1280 represents the first group of four manuscripts, Or. 986 the second group of three, and Cod. Aeth. 16 represents, and is in fact the sole member of, the third group.

In broad terms the work is well done. Manuscript descriptions are extensive and complete. GARCÍA's reasons for grouping them as he does are clear. His English translation is generally good and easily readable. That being said, there is much here that could have been improved upon, both in form and in content.

Most of the problems relate to format. The book is unnecessarily difficult to use due to poor choices of layout for both pages and footnotes. In addition, there are numerous misprints in both English and Ethiopic, and seemingly serendipitous variations in translations.

Upon opening the book, the reader sees facing pages, the Ethiopic text on the left and the English translation on the right, in general a very useful layout. Here, however, there are places where the verse numbers do not match between the Ethiopic and English pages (e.g., pp. 228–229), where parts of verses are omitted on one side or the other (e.g., pp. 142–143), and where the pages do not break at the same lines of text (e.g., pp. 56–57). Furthermore, the Ethiopic text is marked by a system of slanted lines, while the English text is marked by a system of vertical lines. I have no idea what these lines are intended to express, nor do they consistently match up.

Chapter and verse numbers are given on both the Ethiopic and English pages, but the reader who knows English only will not be certain for EMMML Pr. n. 1280 where the citations from Micah end and the commentary begins. The reader of Ethiopic will, of course, be aware of the shift

from Gəʿəz to Amharic. The other two manuscripts mark this shift with technical terms which the author has duly translated.

The footnotes, too, present significant problems. On the Ethiopic side, there are two sets of footnotes. One — labeled a–b–c, etc. — gives textual variants in the citations from the book of Micah. The other — labeled 1–2–3, etc. — gives variants in the commentary. On the English side, however, there is only one set of footnotes giving the variant translations of either the Biblical text or the commentary. If the textual variant in the Ethiopic does not affect its translation, there is no corresponding footnote on the right. This system makes it impossible to match up footnotes in any easy fashion, e.g. footnote 2 on p. 34 is footnote 1 on p. 35. This unfortunate system undoubtedly confused the author, too, so that not infrequently information appearing in one set of footnotes seems mistakenly omitted from its corresponding footnote, e.g. footnote 2 on p. 45 does not seem confirmed on p. 44, nor is the attestation of J marked on p. 45 in footnote 5 confirmed in the corresponding footnote c on p. 44. Likewise the variant “they will allot their cultivated land” rather than “your cultivated land” appears on p. 72, footnote 2, but is not given as a significantly different rendition on p. 73.

English misprints begin on the very first page (“a” that should have been deleted), followed by “beem” for “been” on p. 2 and a missing “who” on p. 3, and so on. Ethiopic misprints are no less frequent, beginning with እ for አ on p. 7, ማ for ሜ on p. 29. Because of this frequency of misprints it can sometimes be difficult to ascertain whether something that looks suspicious is truly a misprint or is rather an accurate representation of the manuscript. Thus on p. 34, do all these manuscripts actually have እግሰ instead of እግዚአብሔር? Is it really ወፈተው on p. 66 and not ወፈተው? Is ለሕዝብየ on p. 90 really ለብዝብየ in the manuscript, or ላዕሊሆሙ on p. 92 really ላዕሊሆሙ?

There is significant inconsistency in both the transcriptions and the translations of identical words. Thus, e.g., a place name is given as “Ilam” on the top of p. 63 and “Eilam” in the footnote on the same page. Similarly on p. 81, ጋኔን in the Micah verse is translated as “demon”, but in the commentary line directly following, it becomes “devil”, and on p. 197 አትተክመንዎም in the Micah verse is translated as “don’t trust” while in the commentary line below, it becomes “have no confidence”.

There is also significant inconsistency in the translations of identical lines of text. In presenting three separate commentary editions as he does, GARCÍA has actually translated much of the text of Micah itself, which is quite often identical from manuscript to manuscript, three times. Thus, for

example, on p. 265 Micah 4:3 is translated as “He will rule among many nations and rebuke powerful peoples from distant countries”, but the identical Gəʿəz verse is translated as “He will rule among many nations and rebuke powerful peoples as far as distant countries” on p. 273. Similarly 4:6 ends with “whom I had pushed away” on p. 277, but “whom I had rejected” on p. 265.

Finally, a minor point: GARCÍA gives the manuscripts letter codes, A–N. A–D and K–N are the letter codes given to the eight commentary manuscripts under study, while E–J identify the four manuscripts and two printed editions used to support his choices concerning quotations from the Biblical text. Why not letter the commentary manuscripts in order? Presumably because the support texts (E–J) are only presented in the critical apparatus to the first group (A–D). And why is that? A case can certainly be made for not repeating Biblical textual variants, but as far as I can see, it hasn't been.

My assertion that the content of the work could have been improved upon is a trickier prospect. It's not so much that I would have liked him to have done more as that I would have liked him to have claimed less. Before offering his three editions, GARCÍA sets out to “... analyse the literary form of the exegesis present ...” (p. 25). This analysis results in the following global typology (p. 26):

- I. Biblical quotation
- II. Commentary:
 - a. Textual variant,
or an amendment,
or an authoritative quotation.
 - b. Translation and/or commentary
 - c. Andem

In actuality however, he observes four different structures: I, IIb (type 1); I, IIa–b (type 2); I, IIb–c (type 3); and I, IIa–c (type 4). Type 1 is the most common pattern seen in manuscript group 1, types 1 and 3 in manuscript group 2, and type 1 again in manuscript group 3. This analysis, according to GARCÍA, shows “major differences between the different groups of manuscripts” (p. 30). To me, he has shown rather that the commentaries are quite similar. It's hard to imagine how else a commentary on a Biblical text might likely be structured. On the other hand, what does seem noteworthy — the fact that the manuscripts of group 2 divide the book of Micah into sections of multiple verses — might have been expanded upon.

Finally, GARCÍA also seeks to "... analyse ... the function and localization of ... technical terms ..." (p. 25). This discussion is helpful and illuminating, although again his claim of "richness and complexity" (p. 30) seems overblown.

Despite all these difficulties, we remain deeply indebted to GARCÍA for providing the international academic community with access to another set of commentaries and for continuing to build the field of Ethiopian Biblical interpretation.

Monica S. Devens

PROVERBIO, DELIO VANIA, *La recensione etiopica dell'omelia pseudocrisostomica de ficu exarata ed il suo tréfonds orientale* = Aethiopistische Forschungen 50. Harrassowitz Verlag: Wiesbaden 1998, pp. 283. DM 148,-. ISBN 3-447-04087-4.

Quale itinerario può aver percorso, tra i molteplici possibili, l'omelia pseudocrisostomica *De ficu exarata* (CPG 4588) nel suo movimento dall'ambito bizantino a quello etiopico? È possibile studiare un testo come questo, veicolato da un'amplissima tradizione manoscritta pervenutaci in una pluralità di lingue dell'Oriente cristiano, senza abdicare ai metodi e ai principi della critica testuale, anzi valorizzandoli anche nei loro più innovativi sviluppi teorici? A questa doppia sfida tenta di rispondere il volume di Delio Vania Proverbio, i cui risultati ripropongono la problematica dell'"itinerario tradizionale" (p. 38) di un singolo testo al livello più generale, e tanto più interessante per storici e filologi, della storia del passaggio di testi cristiani (e di quei testi particolari tanto richiesti nel mercato culturale e religioso di età tardoantica e medievale quali furono i *Chrysostomica*) non solo da una lingua ad un'altra, ma anche tra aree religiosamente diversificate, segnalandosi nell'ambito della moderna attività filologica sui *corpora* orientali per almeno tre qualità di rilievo: 1. l'esplicitazione del metodo con cui le testimonianze manoscritte sono classificate e ecdoticamente collocate, con una particolare attenzione all'aspetto ricettivo delle varie tradizioni orientali rispetto ai plessi di varianti della tradizione manoscritta greca (ma anche siriana o araba) da cui discendono, per la prima volta escussa in maniera relativamente ampia (prima di questo studio ci si doveva rassegnare all'edizione pubblicata in PG 59, 585-590); 2. l'interposizione di interi capitoli di storia della